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CONTRASTS IN THE WORLD-CONCEPTIONS OF EAST AND WEST *)

Lecture by Dr. RUDOLF STEINER, delivered at DORNACH on the
17th of June, 1922.

(CONCLUSION)

Now, however, a time came - speaking generally, in the thousand years preceding the Mystery of Golgotha - when in the Eastern countries man's senses, especially the eyes, first began to be receptive to the impressions of the outer world; this receptivity developed as time went on. Man gradually developed the sense organisation which he now has, adding it to the nerve organisation, which still remained from former times and which enabled him to experience the divine-spiritual deeds.

Earlier he had experienced these divine-spiritual deeds in their purity, without mingling them with sense experiences. At that time, the human being could still experience something, because the gods had not as yet completely forsaken him, but these experiences were immediately absorbed by the sense-organisation, with the strange result that among the great majority of men, the gods, the spiritual beings, were, so to speak, drawn into the sense organisation. I might express this by saying that out of the former purely spiritual contemplation of divine-spiritual beings a belief in ghosts arose.

This belief in ghosts does not reach back into very ancient times in man's history, but the contemplation of divine-spiritual beings is very ancient. The belief in ghosts only arose when sense perceptions were intermingled with the contemplation of the divine. When the Mystery-culture of the East came over to Europe and was taken up, for instance, by the wonderful spiritual life of Greece, flowing into Greek art and Greek philosophy, then the great masses of men coming from the East brought with them also the belief in ghosts.

*) From stenographic notes unrevised by the lecturer.

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So we may say, that during the last thousand years before the Mystery of Golgotha, the Oriental conception as such was already becoming decadent and a kind of belief in ghosts became widely prevalent among the masses of mankind. This belief came over into Europe from the East, and it was the transformation into sense-perception of the former, purely contemplative spirit of the East. We may therefore say that the belief in ghosts is the last ramification, the end of a lofty, though dreamy spiritual vision, which had once constituted a high stage of culture in the evolution of man.

All that has been described to you, how that during sleep the ancient Oriental felt his head to be the earthly field of action for the world of the gods, this could only be EXPERIENCED by him as man, but the initiate of the Mysteries KNEW it. This contrast can already be seen to-day, in the development of a new culture.

This culture is still in its infancy, and the further West we go, the more does it make itself felt. For an ancient Oriental it would have been meaningless to say, for instance, that human thoughts do not pulsate through the human will, for he knew that what lived in his will, and even in his blood, came to him from the gods. The gods made his thoughts and during his sleep condition the gods developed a mighty power in his head. This he felt as inspiration.

Even to-day, when we look across to the East and view the last remnants of Eastern culture, still existing for instance in Solovieff's philosophy, we find, particularly in Solovieff, that he would have been quite unable to understand it, if he had been told that thoughts bring no impulses to man and have no bearing on his will.

Yet Western people, particularly the Americans, have this view. Americans describe what lies immediately before them, even their physiology and biology are represented in this way. If we penetrate into its more intimate fundamental character, we shall find that American science greatly differs from European science. The Westerner portrays how little significance thoughts really have for the human will, for he is far too strongly aware of the fact that it is man who forms the thoughts. Nevertheless he cannot form them out of the blue, and so the modern American declares it to be of far more importance than his actual thoughts, how a man is rooted in a certain family or political party through his social life-conditions, or in the way he has grown into a certain sect. All this, he declares, stirs up emotions in him and determines his will. It is really impossible to influence the will through thought. The will is determined by such life foundations as family, political party, nationality, sect, etc. The American and the Westerner in general argues that thought is not the real ruler in man, but is only the Prime Minister of the ruler, an expensive minister, as Carlyle expressed it. This ruler is the human organism, which is will, instinct, passion, and thought is only the executive organ.

We really have to admit that this is the way of thinking of the great masses of people to-day, who rush forward to assert their own views in the face of old traditions in the world. This is why men like so much to study the ways of primitive man, because they think that he followed his instincts and passions and that his thoughts were merely a kind of reflexion of these instincts and passions.

Consequently, regarding man in this way, the Westerner says he is driven by his instincts and passions. Why? - Because man is not yet organised in a way which enables him to perceive the spiritual behind these instincts and passions, he can only see an instinct or a passion and nothing spiritual behind them. Yet when an instinct or a passion rises up in man, evil though it may be, and no matter in what form it may appear in this or in that man, the SPIRIT lives behind this instinct or passion, even behind the most brutal ones. But to-day man cannot as yet perceive this spirit, for the human race is still in a state of development. It must gradually approach a spirituality which enables man to perceive the spirit whenever he looks within his own being and beholds his instincts and passions. In the future this will be possible. It is a matter of indifference whether a man has good or evil instincts. When he has evil instincts, then Ahrimanic or Luciferic beings lie hidden within him, but these are spiritual beings!

In advancing the view that instincts and passions are the driving powers, we have before us the same case as that of the ghosts in comparison with the spirituality of the past. You see, an ancient spirituality existed in the Oriental conception. This spirituality continued to develop, and as I have already said, during the last thousand years before the Mystery of Golgotha the final product was the belief in ghosts, in seeing ghosts.

We now stand within the evolution of the world in such a way, that on the one hand we see how the belief in ghosts arose out of an ancient spirituality; but at the same time, we see that in the future a purely spiritual contemplation will once more arise. To-day however, there is still an inner belief in ghosts. Just as those who believe in ghosts think that ghosts are sensory things and look like something which the eyes can see, so a man of to-day, a Westerner, does not yet discern the spiritual, when he looks into himself; he only sees something spectral, something ghostly.

All passions, instincts and desires are ghostly spectres, which to-day precede the spirituality of the future, whereas the old ghosts in which people believed succeeded the spirituality of the past. It might be said that the old pure spirituality developed from East to West, then came the belief in ghosts, and the last traces of this belief are still among us. From West to East a future spirituality is developing, which is gradually drawing near, and which will become a reality in a distant future. The first traces of this spirituality, however, appear to be just as spectral as the ancient ghosts, namely the instincts, passions, etc. such as we see them to-day.

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The scholar of to-day must necessarily from his own point of view attribute to man himself his instincts and passions, yet he regards with contempt the general belief in ghosts. He does not realise that this belief of the masses in ghosts has just as much cognitive value and substance as has his own belief in human desires, instincts and impulses. He too is a believer in ghosts, but they are the ghostly spectres which are only now beginning to appear, whereas the great masses believe in ghosts belonging to a time now coming to an end. That is why our European civilisation has become so chaotic, because the old and the new spectres collide with one another.

There is a brief description in one of my "West-East Aphorisms" showing how humanity has been influenced for a long period by an ancient traditional Oriental spirituality on the one hand (a spirituality which had condensed itself into a belief in ghosts) and on the other hand in the belief ~~in the~~ in the spectres of instincts and passions, which is only now beginning to spring into life and which has not yet lost its sensory character. Ghosts, as they are generally called, are spirits which have acquired a sensory-physical character (or have become tangible) through the human organisation, whereas impulses, instincts, desires and passions are modern spectres pointing towards the future, spectres which have not yet been raised to spirituality.

The inner soul-life of a modern European lives in this particularly chaotic co-operation of old and new spectres and a spiritual conception must be found which throws light on both. These questions are not only connected with man's conception of the world, but with the universal human life upon the earth. How can it be otherwise, seeing that not only the spiritual life, but also the juridical, political and economic life depend on such questions, since they all proceed from the particular constitution of man. What, then, is the origin of this whole development? - we must ask ourselves.

I have said that the divine-spiritual beings have their earthly concerns in the human head. In man we distinguish a threefold being: The nervous-sensory being centred chiefly in the head, the rhythmical being which lives in the middle part, and the metabolic limb being, which is contained in the extremities and in their inner ramifications, that is to say, in the real metabolic organs.

Now we know that the gods ordered their earthly concerns during the sleeping condition of the older type of humanity; that they opened their workshop, as it were, in the head of man while he was asleep. What takes place in the man of to-day?

It happens also at the present time that the gods open their workshop in man while he sleeps, but they no longer work in his head, they work now in his metabolic system. But the limb-metabolic organism - and this is what is now most significant and fundamental - remains unconscious even when the human head is awake. Remember how often I have told you that man is awake in his thoughts and ideas;

but when, for instance, the thought comes to him, "Now I will raise my arm, I will move my hand", he does not really know what takes place below, so that the muscle may carry out these movements. This is not known to the man of to-day through his normal consciousness. The whole way in which his thought-life influences his organism remains in the dark. This leads to an unconscious life even when man is awake. The gods' field of action upon the earth to-day is therefore of such a kind that during his waking life man's own natural development no longer enables him to receive this inheritance of the gods when he wakes up.

However, there is a divine-spiritual activity at work in man to-day, from the time of falling asleep to the moment of his awakening, but his surrounding natural conditions no longer enable him to gain an impression of the gods' activity. In the past, man's organisation was so constituted that he felt inspired by his thoughts. To-day, man forms his own thoughts, but in this activity the divine spiritual deeds do not yet work. This capacity must first be developed in mankind.

This is the task - I might call it a cosmic task, which spiritual science must set itself. It must bring man forward in his development, and even pedagogy must be encompassed within such development, enabling him to recognise out of his own inner being and in full consciousness the divine-spiritual deeds. At the same time it will come about that he will no longer see these inner spectres. Facing man's real inner being, the instincts and passions, as they are imagined to-day, are nothing but spectres, even as ghosts are seen outwardly, though these ghosts are not merely fragments of the imagination; they are divine-spiritual forces which have become delusively perceptible to the senses and which are incorrect, untrue imaginings. Similarly the divine-spiritual forces which are active in man's inner being are thought of in the wrong way to-day if we think of them as instincts and passions.

External ghosts are now despised, but what is regarded as so-called science is but a collection of spectres, of inner spectres, and these must be transformed with man's co-operation during the course of cosmic development. Our whole culture must be permeated by impulses which go in this direction. Therein will lie the possibility of breaking away from the forces of decay, or from the chaotic interplay of such decadent forces with constructive forces. (Though mankind still struggles against the latter.) Then we can advance to future stages of human development inspired and driven by the spirit. All this is essentially important.

What I wished to explain to you to-day is even a kind of East-West contemplation, but expressed, I might say, more esoterically. These East-West contemplations are to-day quite in harmony with the times, and this is not meant trivially. Only by such thoughts and considerations can humanity attain a certain degree of consciousness.

We must therefore say: In past times of earthly evolution, man was even in sleep (for he is a human being when he is asleep, even though he does not carry his body about with him) connected with the gods in such a way, that he could perceive with his soul's eyes, with spiritual eyes, how the gods took up their abode in his head, but when he woke up, only the echo of these feelings remained. Man gradually withdrew from this divine-spiritual world, although he could still perceive it dreamily.

The gods descended deeper into the human physical form, and man is connected with them at the present time in such a way that they have now chosen his metabolic system and his extremities as a workshop for the earthly being. But man does not completely abandon this earthly being during sleep. And because this abandonment is not complete, he will once more be able to experience from the world of the gods will-impulses, impulses for his social life, and these he will experience not only in sleep, but also as a complete human being, when he is awake. In other words: Man must acquire more and more CONSCIOUSLY the knowledge of the spiritual world.

CONCERNING MY ACTIVITY AS EDITOR OF THE "GOETHEANUM"
DURING RUDOLF STEINER'S LIFETIME.

By Albert Steffen.

The twentieth anniversary of the founding of the "Goetheanum" Weekly calls for a retrospective survey of that time. Rudolf Steiner's proposal, that I should take over the editorship of the "Goetheanum" came unexpected to me. Had he not asked me for a decision on this matter, I would have continued to live as an independent writer. Although I had not ceased to strive after knowledge in the twelve years spent chiefly in Munich, I rarely felt called upon, before my thirty-fifth year, to publish things transcending the sphere of fiction and poetry. In my first novel, I had already testified that writing is a concern of the spirit, and not only of the soul and of the senses. And so I may now be permitted to quote words which Rudolf Steiner spoke at the Christmas Foundation Assembly of the General Anthroposophical Society in 1923: "Albert Steffen was an Anthroposophist already before he was born; this is something which we must recognise in him."

When I moved to Switzerland in 1920, I felt that it was my duty to give an account of how poetry is related to knowledge. I did it in a threefold way. First of all, from the standpoint of human development in general, by delivering a lecture at the Goetheanum in the autumn of 1920, on "The Crisis in the Life of the Artist". Secondly, by speaking at the Goetheanum the following spring on Dante and Goethe from the standpoint of spiritual history, showing the threads which connect them with the present time. Thirdly, by giving a description of the spiritual streams which live in the writings